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## Luna Moth

The Luna Moth (*Actias luna*), with its incredible size (3-4 inches), sea-foam green to yellow coloring and long sweeping tails is one of the most spectacular moths found in North America. The Luna Moth is common throughout South Carolina. They are active at night although there have been sightings during daylight hours. Luna Moths are most likely seen in forested areas but are often attracted to well-lighted areas in the evening.

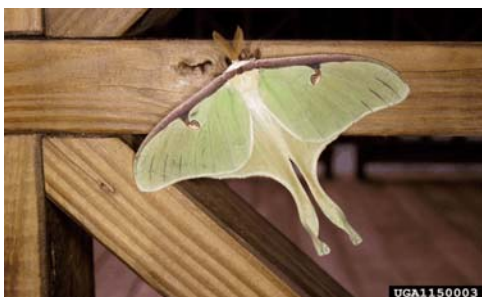


Figure 1. Male luna moth.  
Photographer: Andrew J. Boone, South Carolina  
Forestry Commission: Image 1150003.  
IPMImages.org. <http://www.ipmimages.org/>. 21 Oct 2002.

Luna Moths thrive in eastern North America and a large portion of southeastern Canada. Luna moths that live and breed in Canada and northern bordering states produce one generation per year (May-July). Farther south, through the Ohio river valley Luna Moths have two generations each year. In the deep south it is not unusual for luna moths to have three generations in one year (March -Sept.) In Louisiana there have been Luna Moth sightings recorded during every month of the year.

There are a few visible differences between males and females. Male Luna Moths tend to be a lighter shade of green, and are slightly smaller than females. The females have slender fuzzy antennae. Male antennae fan out much like a feather. There are several visible generational differences as well.

Spring generation moths are a vivid sea-foam green color where as following generations are more yellow.

The wing edges (margins) also differ in color between generations. The spring generation has a reddish purple outer wing margin. Later generations of the year often have a yellow margin.

Luna Moth caterpillars are lime green with orange spots running down both sides. The caterpillars feed on several types of trees, including, alder, beeches, cherries, hazelnut, hickories, pecan, persimmon, sweet gum, and willows. In northern regions these moths prefer white birch, where as hickories, walnut, persimmon, and sweet gum are favorites in the south. The caterpillar molts five times before settling on a host plant where they spin their cocoon. The cocoon is usually spun in a tree but it later falls into the leaf litter which protects it from the harsh conditions of winter. The cocoon is thin and papery consisting of silk and leaf pieces, and it can be very difficult to find among the leaf litter.



Figure 2. Luna moth caterpillar.  
Photographer: Ronald F. Billings: Image 3225091.  
IPMImages.org. <http://www.ipmimages.org/>. 21 Oct 2002.

As with many other silk moths Luna Moths do not feed as adults. The food/energy for its adult stage is stored while it is in the caterpillar stage of life. Therefore the Luna Moth does not have a proboscis (the long slender mouthpart) that is found on many other moths and butterflies. The Luna Moth has some great natural defense mechanisms, such as eye spots on all four wings to confuse predators. The Luna Moth's head is well hidden which usually causes a predator to attack one of the sweeping tails, resulting in the moth's survival.

When you are out at night, (especially around well lighted areas) keep your eyes open and on the look out for this majestic wonder of nature. You might just get lucky and catch a glimpse.

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